



**COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
DEPARTMENT OF AUDITOR-CONTROLLER**

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March 9, 2011

TO: Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich, Mayor
Supervisor Gloria Molina
Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas
Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky
Supervisor Don Knabe

FROM: Wendy L. Watanabe
Auditor-Controller

SUBJECT: **SERENITY FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY CONTRACT REVIEW – A
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES PROVIDER**

We have completed a contract compliance review of Serenity Foster Family Agency (Serenity or Agency), a Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) provider. The purpose of our review was to determine whether Serenity was providing the services outlined in their Program Statement and the County contract.

DCFS contracts with Serenity, a private non-profit community-based organization to recruit, train and certify foster parents for supervising children DCFS places in foster care. Once the Agency places a child, it is required to monitor the placement until the child is discharged from the program. Serenity oversees 35 certified foster homes in which 31 DCFS children were placed at the time of our review. Serenity is located in the Fifth District. DCFS paid Serenity approximately \$896,000 during Fiscal Year 2009-10.

Results of Review

The foster parents indicated that the services they received from Serenity met their expectations, the children indicated that they enjoyed living with their foster parents, and the toddlers we observed appeared well cared for and healthy. In addition, the Agency ensured that social workers' caseloads did not exceed the maximum established by California Department of Social Services' (CDSS) Title 22 regulations. The Agency also ensured that staff possessed the required education and work experience, conducted hiring clearances, and provided ongoing training for staff working on the County contract.

Serenity needs to ensure that foster homes are in compliance with CDSS Title 22 regulations and that foster parent certification files contain all required information. We specifically noted the following:

- Two (67%) of the three homes reviewed did not adequately secure potentially dangerous items. Specifically, one of the homes did not adequately secure detergent and cleaning solutions and another home did not adequately secure alcohol.

Serenity's attached response indicates that the homes have taken steps to secure the potentially dangerous items.

- Two (33%) of the six foster parents reviewed did not complete the required 15 hours of annual continuing education training. At the time of our review, the foster parents had completed zero and five hours of training, respectively. Our prior review also noted this exception.

Serenity's attached response indicates that they are more closely monitoring the foster parents' training hours.

Details of our review, along with recommendations for corrective action, are attached.

Review of Report

We discussed our report with Serenity on November 9, 2010. In their attached response (Attachment I), Serenity management indicates the actions the Agency has taken to implement the recommendations. We also notified DCFS of the results of our review. In their response (Attachment II), DCFS indicates they will monitor the Agency for compliance with our recommendations.

We thank Serenity management for their cooperation and assistance during this review. Please call me if you have any questions or your staff may contact Don Chadwick at (213) 253-0301.

WLW:MMO:JET:DC:AA

Attachments

c: William T Fujioka, Chief Executive Officer
Antonia Jiménez, Acting Director, DCFS
Dr. Jackie Contreras, Chief Deputy Director, DCFS
Randy Argo, Chair, Board of Directors, Serenity
Jennifer Choctaw, Executive Director, Serenity
Jean Chen, Community Care Licensing
Public Information Office
Audit Committee

**FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY PROGRAM
SERENITY FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY
FISCAL YEAR 2009-10**

BACKGROUND

The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) pays Serenity Foster Family Agency (Serenity or Agency), a negotiated monthly rate, per child placement, established by the California Department of Social Services' (CDSS) Foster Care Rates Bureau. Based on the child's age, Serenity receives between \$1,589 and \$1,865 per month, per child. Out of these funds, Serenity pays the foster parents between \$624 and \$790 per month, per child. DCFS paid Serenity approximately \$896,000 during Fiscal Year (FY) 2009-10.

PURPOSE/METHODOLOGY

The purpose of our review was to determine whether Serenity was providing the services outlined in their Program Statement and the County contract. We reviewed certified foster parent files, children's case files, personnel files and interviewed Serenity staff. We also visited a number of certified foster homes and interviewed the children and foster parents. We conducted our review during January and February 2010.

BILLED SERVICES

Objective

Determine whether Serenity provided program services in accordance with their County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations.

Verification

We visited three of the 17 Los Angeles County certified foster homes that Serenity billed DCFS and interviewed five foster parents and four children placed in the three homes. In addition, we reviewed the case files for six foster parents and five children and we reviewed the Agency's monitoring activity.

Results

Serenity needs to ensure that foster homes are in compliance with CDSS Title 22 regulations and that foster parent certification files contain all the required information. We specifically noted the following:

Foster Home Visitation and Foster Parent Certification

- Two (66%) of the three homes reviewed did not adequately secure potentially dangerous items. Specifically, one of the homes did not adequately secure

detergent and cleaning solutions and another home did not adequately secure alcohol.

- Two (33%) of the six foster parents reviewed did not complete the required 15 hours of annual continuing education training. At the time of our review, the foster parents had completed zero and five hours of training, respectively. Our prior review also noted this exception.

Recommendations

Serenity management ensure foster parents:

- 1. Adequately secure detergents, cleaning solutions, alcohol and other items that could pose a potential safety hazard to children.**
- 2. Complete the required number of annual continuing education training hours.**

CLIENT VERIFICATION

Objective

Determine whether the program participants received the services that Serenity billed to DCFS.

Verification

We interviewed three children placed in three of Serenity's certified foster homes and five foster parents to confirm the services the Agency billed to DCFS. In addition, we observed two toddlers who were too young to interview.

Results

The foster children indicated they enjoyed living with their foster parents and the foster parents indicated that the services they received from Serenity met their expectations. In addition, the toddlers we observed appeared well cared for and healthy.

Recommendation

None.

STAFFING/CASELOAD LEVELS**Objective**

Verify that Serenity social workers' caseloads do not exceed 15 placements and that the supervising social workers do not supervise more than six social workers as required by the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations.

Verification

We interviewed Serenity's administrator and supervising social workers and reviewed caseload statistics and payroll records for the Agency's social workers.

Results

Serenity's seven social workers carried an average of 12 cases and the Agency's three supervising social workers supervised three social workers and carried two cases.

Recommendation

None.

STAFFING QUALIFICATIONS**Objective**

Determine whether Serenity's staff possess the education and work experience qualifications required by their County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations. In addition, determine whether the Agency conducted hiring clearances prior to hiring their staff and provided ongoing training to staff.

Verification

We interviewed Serenity's administrator and reviewed each staff's personnel file for documentation to confirm their education and work experience qualifications, hiring clearances and ongoing training.

Results

Serenity's staff possessed the required education and work experience and the Agency conducted hiring clearances and provided ongoing training for staff working on the County contract.

Recommendation

None.

PRIOR YEAR FOLLOW-UP**Objective**

Determine the status of the recommendations reported in the prior Auditor-Controller monitoring review.

Verification

We verified whether the outstanding recommendations from the FY 2006-07 monitoring review were implemented. The report was issued on November 14, 2007.

Results

The prior monitoring report had four recommendations. The Agency fully implemented three recommendations and, as indicated above, findings related to one recommendation in this report was also noted in the prior monitoring review.

Recommendation

3. Serenity management implement the outstanding recommendation from the prior monitoring report.



ATTACHMENT #1 - Serenity Infant Care Homes, Inc.

Response to Department of Auditor-Controller, and Board of Supervisors
County of Los Angeles

Results of Review

Serenity needs to ensure that its certified homes are in compliance with CDBS Title 22 regulations and that the certified parent files contain all required information.

Finding A:

Two of the three homes visited did not adequately secure certain items that could pose a potential safety hazard to children:

Home #1- Detergents and cleaning solutions were stored in an unlocked cabinet in the basement.

Home #2- Bottles of unopened wine were stored in a built-in wine cabinet above the refrigerator.

Results:

Home #1- Certified parents immediately installed a lock on the cabinet in the basement to secure the detergent and cleaning solutions.

Home #2 -Bottles of unopened wine were immediately removed from wine cabinet above the refrigerator and stored in a locked cabinet.

Finding -B:

Of the six certified family files reviewed, one family's file did not contain documentation indicating that the certified parents had completed the required 15 hours of annual continuing education training. The certified father had zero (0) hours in the file, the certified mother had five (5) hours in the file.

Results:

Of the six certified family files reviewed, one family (17%) had an additional three (3) training hours for certified father that had not been filed and an additional (3) training hours for the certified mother that had not been filed. Serenity has put additional protocols in place to more closely monitor the training hours for its certified families.

In Service to Children and Families.

Jennifer J. Choctaw, Ex. Director/Co-Founder

Linda Kontis, Director/Co-Founder



PATRICIA S. PLOEHN, LCSW
Director


County of Los Angeles
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Fourth District
MICHAEL D. ANTONOVICH
Fifth District

December 2, 2010

TO: Aggie Alonso, Chief Accountant-Auditor
Countywide Contract Monitoring Division

FROM: 
Elizabeth A. Howard, Section Head
Out of Home Care Management Division
Foster Family Agency/Group Home Performance Management

**DCFS RESPONSE TO THE AUDITOR CONTROLLER'S CONTRACT REVIEW OF
SERENITY FOSTER FAMILY AND ADOPTION AGENCY**

The Auditor Controller's (A-C) Contract Review of Serenity Foster Family and Adoption Agency was conducted in January, 2010. The Out of Home Care Management Division (OHCMD) received the Auditor-Controller's November 15, 2010 final draft report of the contract compliance review on November 15, 2010. The DCFS monitor reviewed the report on November 30, 2010.

The A-C's draft report indicates that one home did not adequately secure detergent and cleaning solutions, one home did not adequately secure alcohol, and one foster family's file did not contain documentation that the foster parents (husband and wife) completed the required 15 hours of annual continuing education training. The FFA administrator informed the DCFS monitor that they corrected the physical plant findings and submitted the verifying documentation on August 31, 2010. The FFA administrator also informed the DCFS monitor that they have developed a new management tool to better monitor their foster parents' training hours.

The A-C approved Serenity FFA's Corrective Action Plan (CAP). The FFA's CAP indicates that they immediately secured the potentially dangerous items in a locked cabinet, and placed "additional protocol in place to more closely monitor the training hours for its certified families."

The OHCMD will continue to monitor the FFA's ongoing compliance with the State regulations including the A-C's recommendations within six months after the issuance of the A-C's final report.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (626) 569-6804.

"To Enrich Lives Through Effective and Caring Service"

**DCFS RESPONSE TO THE AUDITOR CONTROLLER'S CONTRACT REVIEW OF
SERENITY FOSTER FAMILY AND ADOPTION AGENCY
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c: Brian Mahan, CEO, Children & Families Well-Being Cluster
Wendy L. Watanabe, Auditor-Controller
Patricia Ploehn, Director, DCFS
Lisa Parrish, Deputy Director, DCFS